

Magic and Witchcraft: Belief and Persecution in Global Perspective

CEU Summer University, Budapest

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Syllabus

- ✓ Every session lasts 60 minutes and has a mixed lecture/seminar format

Gábor Klaniczay

Witchcraft accusations and persecutions as conflict-resolution and scapegoat mechanism

Research on witchcraft beliefs and persecutions is an eminently interdisciplinary one. The founding work on the subject is the monograph on the North African Zande witchcraft by the anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard, which interpreted the apparently irrational beliefs as a system to cope with misfortune and evil by blaming the hidden enemy causing it with magical means. His approach inspired the unfolding of historical-anthropological inquiries in the 1970s, research on the “sociology of accusation”. The rich source material of the testimonies of the accusers provided an insight into the internal tensions and conflicts of early modern urban and rural communities and pointed to the uneasy relations within the families, among neighbors, landlords and lodgers, different ethnicities, locals, and strangers. For understanding these conflicts starting with hidden animosities and degenerating into mass-panics, psychological approaches were of great use. All this got framed in recent decades by multilayered historical research on the late medieval emergence of a “society of persecution,” hostile against religious dissidents, heretics, Jews, marginals, and lepers. The formation of a generalized conspiracy theory, representing witches not only as individual evildoers but as a heretical sect allied to the devil, meeting nightly on the witches’ sabbath, represented an explosion. The ruthless inquisition and the oppressive secular judicial mechanism, both operating with torture multiplied the number of accused (the alleged accomplices of the satanic conspiracy), leading to mass executions and a generalized scapegoat concept where diseases, famines, wars of religion all led to renewed witch-panics. Witch hunts created a mechanism of persecution, with its social background, communication tools, animators, and beneficiaries, which survived them and recurred in various other forms until our present age.

Fabrizio Conti

Witchcraft Mythologies and Beliefs from Antiquity to the Middle Ages

This seminar will discuss the main cultural substrata giving shape to witch beliefs, shedding light on their process of amalgamation. Classical literary motives were intertwined with folkloric traditions in the fifteenth century by Franciscan and Dominican preachers, to produce a coherent picture of witchcraft-related beliefs and to give shape to a figure of the witch often centered on that of the strix. A number of ancient and Classical texts will be analyzed and discussed against medieval texts to compare the motives and roots of witch beliefs. We will also discuss how it is possible to trace the different cultural substrata giving shape to witch beliefs and shed light on their process of amalgamation during the medieval period. Folkloric motives were intertwined in the fifteenth century by important figures of friars such as Bernardino of Siena, Giacomo della Marca, Antonino of Florence, and many others, to produce a coherent and multifaceted picture of witchcraft-related beliefs. This lecture aims at discussing how such a process of combination of various cultural traditions gave shape to the construction of witch beliefs such as the witches' shapeshifting, night-flight, or the ability to cast spells.

Michael D. Bailey

The Late-Medieval Origins of the Witches' Sabbath

Some of the most remarkable changes in the long history of witchcraft occurred in the 1430s in a relatively small geographic area around the western Alps. Within a short period of time, the idea that witches operated as members of diabolical cults that gathered at fantastical nighttime assemblies took shape and was encoded in a number of texts. This lecture will explore this development and examine some of the complexities of this highly influential notion of what witchcraft entails.

Witch-Hunting and Skepticism in the New World: Salem and Beyond

Major witch hunts are often taken as the defining feature in the history of witchcraft. Certainly, the famous Salem witch hunt is often taken to be characteristic of colonial American witchcraft altogether. This lecture will undermine such convictions. It will highlight aspects of skepticism even in Salem. Then it will present a focused comparison with the abortive witch hunt in Stamford, Connecticut, also in 1692. Unlike in Salem, only one person was convicted in Stamford, and even she was later acquitted. These case studies will serve to demonstrate the need for greater attention to aspects of skepticism throughout the history of witchcraft.

Magic, Witchcraft, and Gender from Antiquity to the Middle Ages

This lecture will explore the complex role gender has played as a component of magic and witchcraft across time. Beginning with classical stereotypes, magic has often been associated with women. In the early Christian period, magic began to be masculinized and certain kinds of magic became hyper-masculinized in the medieval period. Demonic witchcraft was then powerfully re-feminized in the late medieval period, culminating with the *Malleus maleficarum*.

Peter Geschiere

My descent into witchcraft: Anthropological field-work in Cameroon - issues of reality and belief

My descent into ‘witchcraft’ during anthropological field-work in the Maka villages (forest area of Southeast Cameroun – since 1971) was marked by surprises. Whenever I wanted to discuss politics (my original Ph.D. topic), people talked about *djambe* (a local notion they translated as *sorcellerie*). When I therefore decided to study the nocturnal world of this *djambe*, I learned that the main form was the *djambe le ndjaw* (witchcraft of the house). The most dangerous attacks were believed to come from inside ‘the house’ – that is, from inside the family, for the Maka the obvious basis for all forms of collaboration and trust. In such a context issues of reality and belief take on special aspects.

Modern state courts persecuting ‘witches’ (postcolonial Cameroon)

Since 1980 state tribunals in Cameroun accepted to judge witchcraft accusations, taking the testimonies of local healers as proof of occult aggression. One question is to what extent this is part of a concerted state offensive against witchcraft; it is clear that there is also a strong pressure ‘from below’ on the state to do something against a supposed proliferation of new forms of occult aggression. Another question is to what extent the state’s sanctions are effective in this domain.

Local healers and their ways of dealing with ‘witchcraft’ (Cameroon and Africa in general)

The direct intervention of post-colonial states in the field of ‘witchcraft’ is often presented as a reversal of the jurisprudence developed by the colonial state. In colonial times the state intervened against healers; it was therefore seen by locals as ‘protecting’ the witches. Local ways of dealing with occult attacks took on very different forms, depending on the context. A common idea is that local healers can neutralize witch power, but only if the supposed witch is confessing. The non-confessing witch is seen as the dangerous one. In recent times local forms of healing became deeply affected by an ongoing articulation of imported ideas (modern medicine but also new forms of religion) leading to a staggering proliferation of all sorts of hybrid forms.

Judit Kis-Halas

A brief history of modern pagan witchcraft

(Re)-invented cults and religions form a considerable part of our present-day spiritual landscape and modern pagan witchcraft is undoubtedly one of the most prominent among them. Starting from Gerald Gardner’s wicca, through Starhawks’s and Zsuzsanna Budapest’s Goddess worship to the recent radical movements of eco-feminist witches, the lecture provides a panoramic view on the emergence of modern pagan witchcraft. After the global overview, switching to a local perspective, the lecture will introduce some outstanding representatives of Dianic Wicca and feminine spirituality from Hungary and take a closer look at their communities.

Modern witchcraft in present-day Central Europe

The seeds of various global “traditions” of modern witchcraft have been brought to Central Europe by the winds of political change around the early 1990s. Since then, many of the founding fathers and mothers have left the Wiccan path, some, however, continue to identify themselves as Wiccans and have established their own communities, which, although small, have been in operation for more than

two decades by now. Drawn on ethnographic fieldwork, the lecture will outline the history of the reception of wicca in post-Socialist countries and give insights into the lives of two Hungarian wiccan groups.

Táltos-horse, táltos-massage, táltos-lore: a quick guide to modern western shamanism and ethno-paganism in Hungary

The ideas of modern Western shamanism, a new spiritual path that substitutes the former mechanistic and positivistic human attitude to nature and the world with a holistic-vitalist one, were first introduced in Hungary by anthropologist Mihály Hoppál in 1986, who invited Michael Harner to Budapest. Almost simultaneously with the appearance of modern shamanism, and soon after the change of the political system, ethno-pagan or native faith movements started to flourish in Hungary. Their rapid emergence, however, was not unprecedented, as they strongly built on nostalgic-nationalistic sentiment towards an imagined, pre-Christian, pagan religiosity of the ethnic Hungarians. This religious system was supposed to be shamanism. The figure of the *táltos* (the shaman of the ancient Hungarians) plays a central role in the process of recreating the Hungarian national past because he is the religious and spiritual leader of the pagan Hungarians and the guardian of the Hungarian traditions. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the leading figures of the Hungarian ethnic-pagan scene identify themselves as *táltos*. In addition, some of them were among the Hungarian disciples of Harner or Horowitz. The lecture presents some of the prominent *táltoses* of the present-day currents of native faith in Hungary and hints at the possible links between their activities and modern Western shamanism.

Marina Montesano

Women as Medium(s).

The Hebrew Necromancer of Endor summoning the spirit of Samuel; the Pythia of Delphi through which Apollo expressed himself; the Valkyries who are psychopomp figures, who aid the transit of the most valiant warriors -chosen by them- into the Afterlife; Shamanic techniques, which in many cultures are feminine, not masculine, provide a means of addressing the spirits. They are all different traditions and techniques but have in common that women act as vehicles and vessels for the voices of gods, spirits, and the dead - depending on cultural contexts. The lecture attempts to draw a phenomenological overview of them.

Desire and Magic.

Desire is defined by psychoanalysis as an omnipresent drive in human nature, and in the magical realm, we see this drive operating constantly. Every magical action aims to satisfy a desire: the search for wealth or revenge, the will to possess, the desire to know events in the future, the erotic drive. It is precisely the latter that turns out to be important in treaties and trials relating to witchcraft, as it is considered to be a drive typical of the female gender that makes one inclined to succumb to the devil's flattery.

Weather Magic and Witchcraft.

The ability to control natural phenomena, and storms in particular, is one of the oldest and longest-lasting magical activities, attested in the ancient world and recurring in witchcraft trials, and can have

beneficial as well as destructive effects. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the appearance of the three witches and other topical moments are highlighted by storms: and there were, at the origin of the play, precise historical references to recent events. Beyond *Macbeth*, storms remain linked to literary representations of magic and horror until our times.

Basile Ndjio

Homosexuality, Witchcraft and Occult in Africa: from pathologization to demonization

In this seminar, we will be discussing the change in the problematization of same-sex sexuality by the postcolonial African politico-judicial order. Using the example of Cameroon, it will be demonstrated through some case studies of trials for homosexual offenses recorded in several public courts over the past decade that homosexuality was initially criminalized as a result of moralized and pathologizing discourses that conceived same-sex sexuality as sexual perversion and deviance, whereas nowadays suspected or self-identified homosexual people are prosecuted because their unconventional sexuality is increasingly perceived as “*sexualité du diable*” (devil's sexuality) or satanic sexual practices. It will also demonstrate that the increasing demonization of same-sex desire is accompanied by the relexification and re-naming of homosexual individuals as dangerous sorcerers.

'Naming the evil: Democracy and Sorcery in contemporary Cameroon and South Africa'

This seminar explores the connection between the proliferation of witchcraft rhetoric in contemporary Cameroon and South Africa and modern developments, most notably the adoption by these two countries of liberal democracy. More precisely, in the present seminar we will seek to understand why the democratization process on which both Cameroon and South Africa embarked the early 1990s resulted not only in the propagation of “spiritual insecurity” (Ashforth 2005) or “occult economies” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999), but also in the superfluity of witchcraft discourses in these two countries. Does the power of such discourses on occultism reflect the contradictory consciousness of a people who are still caught in an essentially magical view of the world or whose worldview is still rooted in an essentially religious cosmology, as earlier generations of anthropologists generally understood African witchcraft?

Mokoagne moni: the devil's money, evil git and the cursed shared in central Africa

Why are some gifts considered "good money", whereas others are viewed as "cursed and poisoned gifts"? Why are some acts of generosity and magnanimity highly valued and appreciated by the donor's community, while others are strongly suspected of being malicious to the point of inducing anxiety or fear in recipients?

In this seminar on the ambivalent perception of gifts in Central Africa malevolent gift, we will discuss the form of gift that cannot be given or accepted because it is commonly associated with what the urban popular language in Cameroon refers to as *mokoagne money*. This term refers to occult or devil's money, which not only brings bad luck and misfortune to its recipients but also holds them in mystical servitude and captivity. Through case studies, it will be demonstrated that while gifts and donations that allow members of the donor's community to flourish are generally appreciated and valued as "argent de Dieu" (God's money), forms of excessive redistribution and munificence that undermine the local ethic of giving and transgress family and ethnic logics of mutual aid and wealth distribution are rejected as devil's money.

Michael Ostling

Opposition: Witchcraft accusation and the limited good

This class makes use of comparative materials from Melanesia, Africa, Central America, and Eastern Europe to explore the cosmological economics underlying grassroots witchcraft suspicion and accusation. The cognitive structure of opposition, paired with cosmologies of the "limited good," I suggest, is key to understanding witchcraft beliefs globally.

Inversion: Witches as cannibals, sodomites, infanticides, and Jews

The "cumulative concept of the witch" owes a great deal to earlier slanders against heretics and Jews - combining fantasies of heretical incestuous orgy with the myth of Jewish ritual murder of Christian babies. Although trials for heresy and ritual murder trials continued throughout the period of the witch trials, the differences between the two are at least as important as the similarities. Examining these differences can help us understand what makes witchcraft beliefs distinct from other forms of prejudice or xenophobia.

Transvaluation: Feminist, Pagan, and Revolutionary Uses of the Witch Image

This class explores the ethics and politics of contemporary martyrologies by which the witch is made into an oppositional figure: a victim of decidedly modern oppressions, a magical rebel against those oppressions. While making clear the weak historical basis for such uses of the past, I hope also to celebrate their creativity.

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Witch-hunting in contemporary Africa

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